

# Trinidad and Tobago: Unique Niches

By Omar González

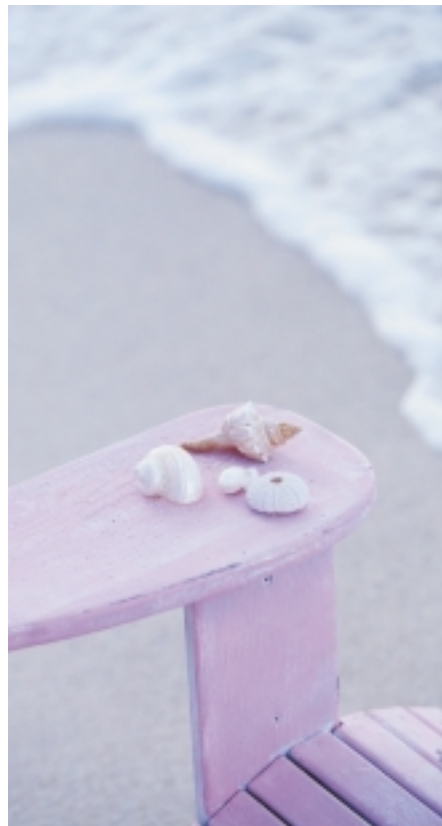
In addition to the wider markets of the food service and retail sectors, this nation's two islands offer two lucrative niche markets to U.S. food and beverage suppliers that could easily be overlooked because they form informal parts of the general retail and food service sectors.

## Sell by Feeding the Energy Industry

The most recent energy discovery is forecast to yield 1 billion barrels of oil and 2.5 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. To tap these reserves, companies are building drilling sites staffed by crews that can range anywhere from four to 75 members. Trinbagonians, as the islanders are popularly called, make up the majority of crews, but there is usually a small contingent of British and/or U.S. personnel on board.

Their food is supplied by a handful of catering businesses in Trinidad. They typically buy everything locally, even imported products, from distributors and importers. If a U.S. company becomes a supplier for one of these importers, however, it can be a lucrative partnership.

Caterers enter into supply agreements with short-term (three to four months) drilling contractors and into three-year agreements with major oil and gas companies when long-term production facilities are involved. In most cases, caterers provide full service, which includes everything from the food products to personnel to prepare the meals. Catering personnel may include a chef or supervisor, cooks and bakers. Most chefs and supervisors have local



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culinary degrees. Kitchen or galley facilities are normally well equipped with all cooking and storage necessities, and are supplied every week or two.

Crews are usually served four hot meals a day; snacks are available 24 hours a day. Crews typically get a choice of two meat entrées at every meal.

To enter this market, contact the catering companies. Although caterers do not import directly, they know which products will work in the offshore operations service. Classic Caterers is the largest such company in the country. Cater Serve, Food Etcetera and Malabar Farms are also important players in this field. If a caterer is interested in a U.S. product, it will refer the exporter to their distributor, which will procure the product for them.

The best prospects include canned vegetables, chocolates, ice cream, apples, pears and grapes. Roasted coffee and beef also have great potential. Alcohol is prohibited on any offshore operation.

## Sell by Feeding Yacht Owners

Until recently, Trinidad and Tobago was a little-known stop for most boaters. In 1990, only 637 yachts called at its ports. A decade later, 3,249 yachts docked in its harbors.

The country, just south of the hurricane belt, usually escapes major storms, making it a favorite with wealthy tourists.

Practically all food products do well here. Although yachts are usually equipped with refrigerators and freezers, the units tend to be small and need frequent restocking. Shelf-stable products also have excellent potential. Here, alcoholic beverages can sell. Luxury goods, such as steak, breads and cheeses, do well, along with fresh produce, pasta and pasta sauces.

An exporter's best bet is to contact a supplier directly. Close contact with a retailer serving this market is essential. ■

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For details, see FAS Report TD2002. To find it on the Web, start at [www.fas.usda.gov](http://www.fas.usda.gov), select **Attaché Reports** and follow the prompts.

